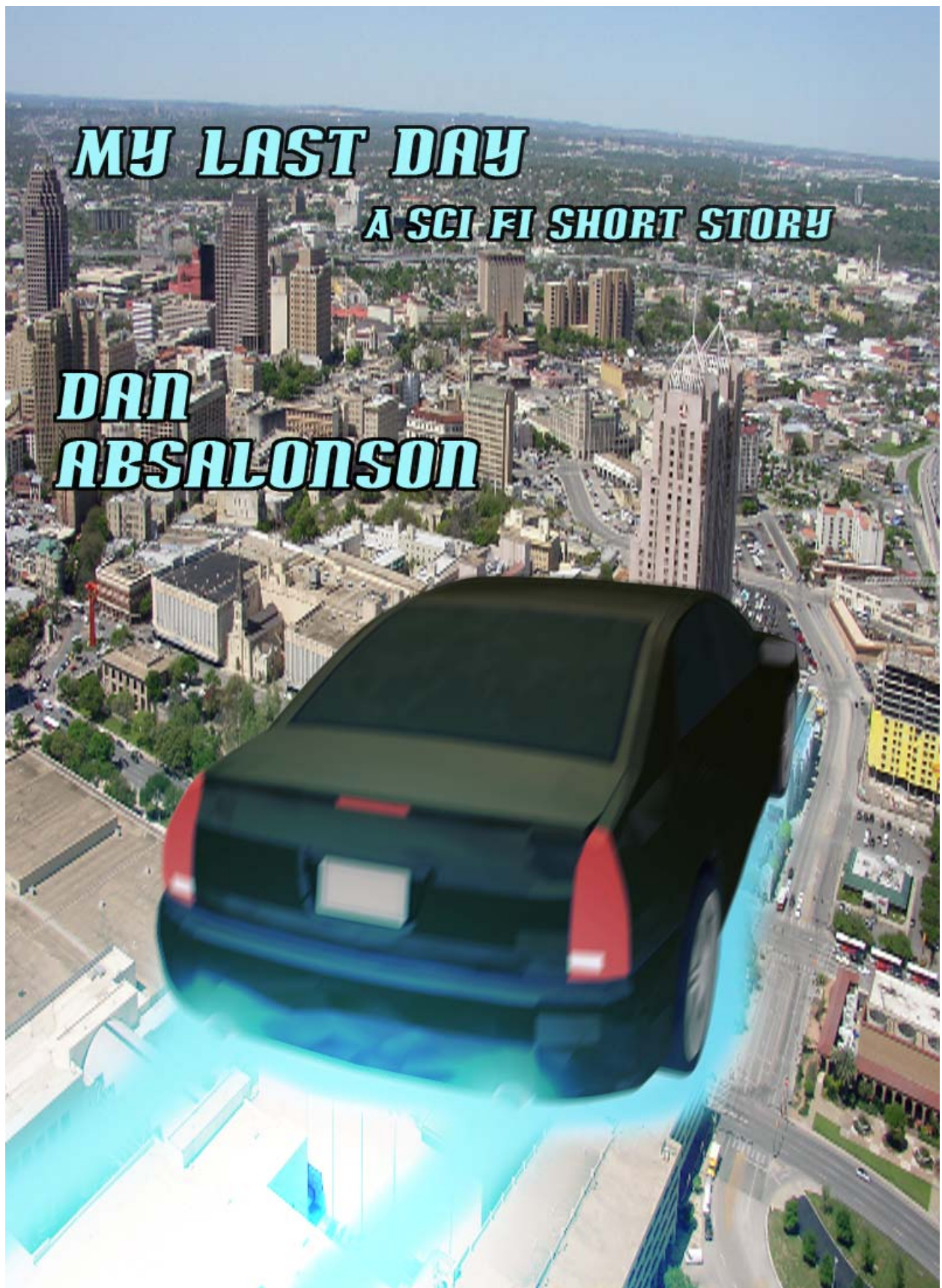


MY LAST DAY

A SCI FI SHORT STORY

**DAN
ABSALONSON**



**Dedicated to my wife Kadi and son Seth,
who slumbered as I typed out this story.**

My stomach hurt for two reasons. The crook I was waiting to i.d. was on a delayed flight, and I was on my second cup of coffee. Coffee will do that to me when I drink too much, but I've got this problem; I can't pass up a good deal. I mean come on, a refill for a quarter of the price? Who can say no to that? But the extra java wasn't helping my already spent nerves, and once his arrival time had passed, so did my ability to relax.

I wasn't used to working in the field anymore; but I took this beat for a reason. It was my last day on the job, and last chance to get intel on a group I'd been trying to bring down for a long time. If anyone was going to ruin my chance at a strong finish, I wanted it to be me. Besides, an old guy is much less conspicuous than a hardened field agent.

I looked up one more time to the screen displaying the list of flights. There it was, blinking in a menacing red glow; delayed. I could feel my pulse beating in time with the seven bright letters; like when you notice the wipers sync with the music in your aircar. My eyes were just about to attempt the news again, when it stopped. No more blinking, but a new word in calm static green; arrived. Now I could feel my heart speeding up, and as it went into my throat, I mumbled under my breath, "Here we go!"

Muffled voices began to float my way from the grey tunnel beyond the arrival gate. Soon a thick crowd poured out into the terminal, like eager shoppers on Black Friday.

According to a J.R. Murdock we arrested the night before, he was supposed to be on this flight wearing a black leather jacket. I was here to see if that was true; and haul the guy in if possible. I had Murdock's phone and car. He was a transporter, who's impersonation I was hoping to pull off. If all went well the criminal would get in when I pulled up, thinking I was whisking him off to a safe house. I tried to look like I was reading the news on my tablet while sneaking looks through the crowd. I was about to give up and take another sip of coffee when I spotted him near the end of the parade. With the click of a button, I had a snapshot of his face. I couldn't make my move until his identity was confirmed in the system.

I left the remains of my tan cooling coffee, and with quick strides made my way to the transport. As I walked, I sent a message to my friend and best field agent Nate. With the photo attached, I requested that it be verified with facial recognition software. I received a message back just as I swung open the transport door.

It's him Matt, verified and all. Move forward as planned.

I jumped in, buckled up, and started the thrusters. While lifting away from the docking bay, I reached for the glove box and pulled out a thin piece of latex. Wrapping it around

my neck, I waited for his call. An unfamiliar ring sounded, and I lifted the phone to my ear.

"This is Murdock," I said.

"I'm here, where are you?" a voice barked through the tiny speaker. I hoped the modulator wrapped around my neck was calibrated well enough to fool him.

"I had to park at the waiting dock, since your flight was delayed. I'm on my way."

"Fine, just hurry up. I'm out in the open here!"

I hung up the phone, and pulled the modulator from my neck, thankful that Nate had rigged one up in the car so I wouldn't have to keep using it. No one likes a sweaty neck.

Nate was really into gadgets, so he was thrilled I let him take care of the transport. The modulator he put in would change my voice when I used the communicator to speak to the back seat, which was separated from the front by thick durasteel.

It was a vehicle used to transport questionable people, kind of like a private taxi service for bad guys. It was a dangerous business, but highly profitable. These drivers were highly profitable to us for intel, but we could never get enough evidence on one to make an arrest. Luckily, a guy we had been trailing was caught picking up someone on our wanted list. It turned out this driver had plans with a man I was trying to track down. When we got it out of him who his next pick up was, I was glad we had his car waiting for us in the impound. After Nate looked it over, he told me the car's rear compartment was set up so the passengers couldn't see the driver. It was pretty easy to plan what came next. The only way this guy knew who would be picking him up would be from the car, and the voice. Pretty smart for a criminal transporter to come up with a business model that included his anonymity as part of the deal. You wouldn't want a problem with the kind of people he drove around.

I landed the craft just in front of my guy. One thought burned in my mind; he would tell us everything he knew about his employer. I would make sure of that before hanging up the badge and eating cake at my retirement party tonight.

He got in the back quickly, carrying a black leather briefcase matching his coat. Once in the back, I could only see him on a little display screen. It was mounted on the dash and hooked up to a camera in the back seat.

As we flew off into the pale morning sky, he watched the cracked street shrinking away through dark tinted windows. In my mind, his chance at escaping had a nice correlation with his view of the street. We didn't talk for a while, but I needed to choose a sky lane, so I activated the vehicle's com.

"I'm going to need a destination."

"Go to the University District, 5004 N. E. 17th Avenue."

"We will be there shortly."

I released the talk button and turned on the com unit in my ear to relayed the message back to Nate.

"I've got location of Holyfield's destination, copy?"

"Have location, copy that, ready to receive."

As I gave the address, my excitement grew exponentially. Usually I was a stickler about radio chatter, but I couldn't help myself.

"This could really be it Nate, on my last day!"

"I know, we're all excited for you here, the decorations around the office look real nice."

"Is that so?"

"Oh yeah Matt, I asked them all if they knew who the party was for, didn't think they'd go to all this trouble for a guy like you."

"Shutup Lowell, are they really decorating the office up?"

He laughed, "they sure are."

"I can't believe it. Ok, enough chatter, I'm slacking in my old age."

"Alright old timer, is that it then?"

I paused, trying to get my bearings, and said, "No. There's more, just give me a second to think through this."

The line was silent.

"Alright listen, I want all active men to move in on that location, and search the place."

"But..."

"I know what you're thinking, but he's on our wanted list, that should help. See if you can get a search warrant by the time our people get there. I'm going to bring him in, and try to get some information out of him."

"Copy that captain. Balloons and everything, I mean it's really ni..."

"Shut up Nate, get those men moving."

"You got it boss."

#

We continued along for a while, but eventually I had to turn off into a sky lane that didn't go towards his destination, and he noticed. So much for a peaceful ride. At least he wouldn't be getting out, the guys told me this car was reinforced just about everywhere.

He did start asking me questions, however. I ignored him, and when he tried calling me on the cell phone, I ignored that too. Then he went for the windows and doors. I did my best to remain focused, but I couldn't stop myself from giggling at his fruitless efforts. Having given up on the doors and windows, he tried his luck with the sun roof; which proved to be the turning point of his rage. He tried at it again with his blaster. I chuckled.

I had him.

I laughed even harder as I saw him hit the seats in frustration. Then he did something unexpected, he stopped hitting the seats and a smile began forming on his evil little face, as if he had forgotten some solution to his problem.. He opened his brief case, and pulled out a stapler. I looked on as a spectator; becoming intrigued by what he might try next. What could he do with a stapler? Who even used those these days, no one uses paper anymore.

Then reached into his briefcase again, and pulled out some flying goggles. Then he scooted over to the driver's side door, flipped back the top of the stapler, pushed it up

against the door, and pressed down. A bright green laser shot right through the door, I could see it in my side view mirror coming out the other side. It must have gone through the door's lock, because when he was done it swung open with a quick kick. I was baffled; Nate told me there was no way of getting out of this thing once the doors were locked.

I looked down and saw him shooting off into the skyline, bright blue jets of light thrusting him forward from the bottoms of his bulky black boots. He would easily get away if I remained in my vehicle; there was no way to keep up with him heading towards all the skyscrapers as he was. No aircar can turn like a man with rocket boots. I set the car's nav point to return to our station.

I was losing visual quickly, so grabbed a special rifle from the passenger seat, and opened my window. His silhouette was quickly fading, but with my scope the shot was possible. Luckily, he was flying almost straight away, so I didn't need to lead the target much. I squeezed the trigger, and watched a tiny tracking ball shoot through the sky and hit him right in the butt. He jerked from the sting which threw him off course. As he regained his balance, he tried pulling it off of his pants, but it was no use. He wouldn't be getting that off, not even with his stapler. It was covered in the strongest glue in the galaxy.

From the tracking display on my tablet, I saw a small blue dot appear, soaring through the city map at a blistering rate. It's just like these criminal types, when he finally decides to be in a hurry, I'm chasing him.

I put down the rifle and reached past it for my jet pack. Most field agents had the boots, but I didn't see the use of wearing weighty waffle stompers, while sitting behind a desk all day. For this reason, I was going old school. I never would have guessed my easy pick up and transport was going to turn into a sky chase.

Strapped on tight, it felt like a heavy back pack filled with tons of thick textbooks; something my son would never know thanks to e-books. I pulled some goggles over my eyes. As I was tightening the strap in the back I thought, 'this must be what Michelle feels like when she's pulling back her hair into a pony tail,' followed by, 'I'm glad I'm a guy.'

I swung open the door, peered out below me at a blur of buildings, and then hesitated. It wasn't that I was getting too old for this, I was too old for this! After a few moments of telling myself I couldn't let him get away, I jumped into the pale blue sky.

My climate controlled world was replaced in a flash with one of strong chilly winds. I didn't like the feeling of falling, it did a number to my stomach, so I activated the thrusters and began my chase. The initial lurch made the straps dig into my armpits. Padded as they were, I could never get used to that feeling. I looked towards the horizon, but he was now beyond my site.

He wouldn't be getting away. Not today, not on my last day, and not with a tracking ball stuck to his right butt cheek. I let out an inaudible chuckle, stifled by the wind blowing quickly past me with chafing force. The little blue dot indicated he was heading quickly towards the University district. I activated my com.

"This is Selznick! Transport returning to the station. On jet pack pursuing Morris, he escaped from transport. Patch me through to the ground team."

"I'm having trouble hearing you Captain, but I think I got all that. Putting you through."

"Captain, this is Plested. Go ahead"

"Alright Mike, Listen. I want all units to continue to the location, but keep a safe distance. Everyone is to remain completely hidden until my orders change, is that clear?"

"Yes sir, we'll wait for your next move, and remain out of site."

"Good. I want to see what this guy is up to."

"Copy that Captain."

Using my tracker, I was able to keep a good distance. Eventually he slowed and started to make a more direct path toward the location my team was waiting at. When the blue dot stopped, I got back on my com.

"Does anyone have visual?"

"Affirmative Captain."

"Good. And all officers have remained a out of sight, copy?"

"Copy, all officers are out of sight."

"Where in the building did it look like he was going?"

"He used a secluded rear entrance which, according to the blue print, leads down some stairs into a storage area."

"Ok, I'm still a ways out. I want Lowell waiting to go in with me when I get there. Everyone else keep a tight perimeter, we can't let this guy escape."

"Copy that."

I poured on the speed, feeling the goggles press harder into my face. Every moment that passed seemed like the long hours in the office after a big lunch. When I arrived, Nathan was there waiting with gun drawn ready for my lead. As I unbuckled my jetpack, I noticed he was panting. I approached him and he swung his gun behind his back, and I thought I saw it blink green indicating it had just finished re charging.

"You alright Nathan?"

"What? Yeah, I'm just nervous, your last day and all."

He laughed. It was a nervous laugh I wasn't used to coming from him. I gave him a quizzical look.

"I just don't wanna mess this up, that's all."

He gave a half smile, and I gave him a couple pats on the shoulder.

"There's a reason I asked for you Nate, you're the best field agent I've got."

His smile became full as I went to the other side of the door, and pulled out my handgun.

"You ready?"

He nodded.

"Let's do it."

He opened the door, and I swung inside, arms out, with my weapon pointing into the empty room. I saw nothing but blank walls and a staircase leading down. It smelled like thruster exhaust inside. I put my index finger up to my mouth to indicate silence, and motioned to Nate that it was clear. He made his way in slowly.

"He must have thrust down to the bottom," I said in a whisper.

"Let's go on foot, I don't want him to hear us if we can help it."

He nodded, and followed close behind. It grew darker as we moved from the open doorway down the stairs. Dull lights on the walls splashed color oddly, giving each stairway a pale yellow glow. We tread lightly down the switchback staircases, ready for a gunfight at each new turn. After descending about a baker's dozen, we came to an end. Opposite of the last set of stairs was a rusty metal door framed in cement.

The lights down here were different. They looked like they had been installed recently, and cast a bright white shine on everything. We approached slowly, keeping our steps silent across the cold colorless floor. There was a problem, the door had no handle. I looked to Nathan, as he had more experience with this type of thing. He motioned me back towards the steps and leaned in close.

"I saw an article on something like this in my Tech Geek RSS feed the other day," he said in a whisper.

I shot him a puzzled look.

"What are you talking about?" I whispered back.

"It's like what they've had in aircars for a long time now, and even normal cars back in the day. No more locking and unlocking. When you get close enough to the vehicle with the key in your pocket, it unlocks automatically. I bet this door is the same, if you've got the signal key on you that matches this door, when you get close enough to it, it will open. I think he's in there Matt, I can see a heat signature."

"What are you talking about?"

"When I had my eye surgery done, I paid extra to get heat vision. I see something the size of a man giving off heat in there. I think that's why they chose this place as a hideout for him. From above, you wouldn't be able to detect him, even with heat vision, we're too far down."

"You're sure you can see him, through these thick walls?"

"You know how much I research a product before spending even half a cred on it. These babies don't lie," he pointed to his eyes.

"So what do we do, wait until he decides to come out for groceries?" I said.

Nathan smiled. It was a mischievous smile, one that said 'I was hoping you would ask.'

"It's a good thing they needed oxygen in that room, and didn't install a door that's sealed on the bottom. I've wanted to try this thing out."

He pulled a little metal box off of his belt and laid it on the ground.

"What is that?" I said.

"You'll see."

He knelt down, and opened the box. Inside of it was a small plastic stick with a button on the end, wired into the box with a long thin cable.

"This is the magnetizer," he said with great mirth.

He placed the magnetizer carefully to the side and then began to unfold the box. With all of the sides unfolding twice, it lay flat on the ground at about the size of a piece of paper.

"Now watch," he said simply, all the while retaining his boyish grin.

He slid the sheet of metal silently underneath the door, and then walked back to the stairway, the thin cable running from the sheet to the magnetizer in his hand. He waived at me to follow, and we walked back up the first flight of steps, and around to the second.

"Wouldn't want to catch a stray piece of door in the eye. Plug your ears," he said.

He took out some ear plugs from a small pouch hanging from his belt.

"A big fan of Batman?" I said.

"Shut up Selznick," he said with a furrowed brow, putting one of his ear plugs in. I think my comment hit a little too close to home, so I changed the subject.

"So what does this thing do?"

He refrained from putting in his other earplug.

"The sheet of metal is actually two sheets being held together by little hinges connecting them all, and allowing the pieces to fold. Between the sheets of metal, there are very powerful magnets which are demagnetized. When I press this button, they will become magnetized. The thing is, they're placed to push away from each other."

"You're telling me little magnets are going to get that door open?" I said.

He nodded, "very powerful little magnets."

His smile was back. He put the other ear plug in, and held up the magnetizer. He gave me a wicked grin as he raised his thumb, and then pressed the button. I jumped. The sound, like a car smashed in a compacter, hurt my ears even with my hands over them. After recovering from the seismic shock, we rushed down to see the damage. What was left of the door hung crunched into the top of the doorway. We got on either side and raised our guns. Nathan waited, watching for my signal.

"I want him alive, but don't be a hero," I whispered over the rising dust.

"You got it boss," he said.

I squeezed the gun in my hands, took a silent breath, and then strode quickly through the doorway looking for anything that might move. I blinked hard, thinking it was an illusion; a trick of the light with all the dust from the door settling. My voice rang out against the smooth concrete walls in a dejected scream,

"No!"

Nate rushed in, joining me in the bare room.

"There's no way! I screamed.

What Nathan had seen was an old power generator, about six feet tall, and as big around as a man.

"He's got to be in here somewhere! We must have missed something, let's double back."

I activated my com.

"Any activity up there?"

"Negative Captain."

I stopped to calm myself with a few deep breaths. I couldn't lose it now, not when we were so close. I rubbed my temples, where I could still feel marks from the air goggles, and began to reclaim my focus.

"We reached a dead end. What should we be seeing down here?"

"You should have gone down thirteen staircases, and reached a twenty by twenty room adjacent to the bottom stairwell."

"So you're telling me there's nowhere else he could have gone but this room at the bottom of these steps?"

"That's right, according to these blueprints."

"How old are they?"

"A few decades sir."

"There has been some recent upgrading to the building down here, we must have missed something. It's got to be something not on those blueprints. We're going to see what we can find, keep the perimeter tight."

"Copy that."

Nathan followed my resigned gait out of the room. Reaching the bottom of the steps I leaned my head against the rail.

"Are you alright Matt?"

"We had him Nate, I thought we had him."

"He hasn't escaped yet."

"Then where is he?"

"Let's make our way back up, and find out."

"You're right Nathan. I've embarrassed myself; I just want this so bad. He's got to be in here somewhere!"

"I know how much this means to you Matt. Let's do this so we can eat that cake your wife made for your retirement party."

"I knew I brought the right man down here with me. You're the only one who, hey what is that?"

As I lifted my head from the rail I noticed a glimmer of metal in my periphery. Under the staircase was a thin black smudge.

"Those must have been made from his boots but it looks like he just walked right into the wall."

I approached the wall and took a closer look.

"He must have been hiding under the stairs until we went into that room. He's got nowhere to go, come on Matt let's go get him," Nathan said.

"Wait a sec, I think I found something here. You know anything about something like this? It looks like there could be a door here, but I don't see any seams in the wall."

"We're wasting time Matt, let's go up and get to him before the others do, don't you want to be the one to apprehend this guy?"

I was feeling along the wall, immersed in finding any abnormality that might hint at what I hoped was there. It took me a few to process what Nate had said. I turned around and looked at him.

"Get over here, and help me look at this wall Nathan, that's an order!"

He slowly shook his head at me, then looked down at his big jet boots.

"You don't want me to do that Matthew," he said looking up again."

"Yes, I do; what are you talking about?"

He folded his arms, not moving an inch.

"Come on Matt, we're wasting time!"

He started heading for the stairs. I ran over to him and blocked the path.

"Nathan, I'm giving you an order. Go and inspect the wall near that shoe smudge."

"And if I refuse?"

I raised my gun, unable to put up with anything more that would delay my search. I knew I was out of line, but he was picking the worst time to test my nerves.

He let out a big sigh, his face forming into a casual but annoyed look, and walked towards the smudge on the ground. As he approached, a portion of the wall pulled back and slid to one side.

"There, are you happy? I took the signal key off him, he's dead Matt."

He turned back towards me, his mouth in an evil grin, and his gun raised at me.

"Throw your gun over towards me, and your com"

I had no other choice, but it took me a minute because I was so shocked. I threw my gun, down first, and it tumbled near his feet. Then I pulled the com out of my ear, this was my one chance. I chucked it at him, as hard as I could right at his face. He couldn't help but flinch and raise his hands up to stop it. It was just enough time for me to rush him. I lowered my shoulders as I lunged forward and plowed into his stomach. He gasped for breath as he fell back to the ground, his gun flying from his hand. I scrambled to get up and reach my gun which lay just out of reach, but as I tried, he kicked the back of my left knee and I fell back to the ground. The pain surged through my body like a screaming baby demanding attention. I tried to ignore the pain, and army crawled to my gun. I picked it up and spun just in time to see him get a hold of his weapon.

I shot towards his hand but the shot ripped through his forearm. He cried out in pain as the gun flew out of his hand. His arm was bleeding heavily, and he soon passed out. I crawled over to my com on the ground.

"I need a medic down here stat!"

"Yes captain, they're on their way down now."

"Were on the bottom floor, and send the coroner too, I found Morris, Lowell killed him."

I heard boot thrusters above, and looked up to see two men quickly dropping down past the stairs. They both landed gracefully and ran to Nate.

"His vitals don't look good."

"You're going to need to arrest him."

The medic looked up.

"Excuse me sir?"

"He pulled a gun on me, and murdered our suspect."

:His eyes grew wide, probably something that doesn't happen often on the face of a medic.

"Yes sir, he'll be detained while being cared for."

"Thank you. Keep him alive, we need him," I thought about that one.

"They'll need him," I said quietly to myself. The medic was too busy to hear me. The back of my knee throbbed. I laid there thinking about how Nate could have been working for them under my nose all this time. A lot of failed missions made a lot more sense now. There were definitely times where we seemed to have everything under control, and then somehow a suspect would get away. I never thought to expect my best man and close friend. It would be hard to get used to the idea that I was retired, until they carried me up and out on a lift.

#

My explanation of a mole working under me and the subsequent paper work I had to fill out on that subject extended my last day until the end of the night. They said I could come back and finish it later, but I was determined it would be my last day. I have to say, I have never eaten cake in so foul a mood as that night. I didn't think a man could eat cake and remain upset; but let me tell you, it can be done. I did my best to act cheerful during the party in the office. People had taken time to decorate and prepare food, I didn't want to ruin it, and it was a great party. It would have felt great to take it all in and realize I was retiring, if I just could stop wondering if Nate really thought he was going to eat some of this cake. Maybe he hadn't planned on getting discovered that day.

I left the completed papers on my strangely empty desk, and carried a few boxes to my car. It took me two trips, and on the last one, I turned to look at my office before flipping off the light. The empty book cases, the fake plant I had never liked, the desk I

had sat at for so many years, working to find leads. I could leave this all behind now, knowing that Nate would be forced to give my colleagues everything they would need. With his inside information, they could finally take down the big operation of illegal technology smuggling I've spent my career fighting.. I hadn't wasted all my time in here, no sir. It was a good last day.

I flipped off the light, and walked back to my car, not looking back. For the first time in these tumultuous twenty years, I was able to let it go. I was able to leave without taking my work with me. Maybe the first night in two decades that I slept like a baby.

THE END

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<http://writingsofdan.blogspot.com/2010/05/writings-of-dan-episode-02-my-last-day.html>

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